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ABSTRACT

There are two disconcerting aspects of the research studies selected and discussed in the publication "Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading" (1985). One is the kinds of reading materials that were designated as sources for meeting the various functions of reading; the other is the omission of the role of picture books, especially the role that illustrations in picture books play in beginning reading. The book does not mention the research studies indicating that illustrations in picture books influence certain attitudes and skills associated with the beginning reading process such as vocabulary development, experiential background, comprehension, mental imagery, reading motivation, and reading interests. Research findings also offer some implications about the criteria that should be considered when illustrated books are selected for young children, such as coherence and unity in the relationship between the text and the illustrations. Finally, the authors of "Becoming a Nation of Readers" failed to mention the use of library or trade books that might be read for purposes of entertainment, information, and directions. (HOD)

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CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO ILLUSTRATIONS IN PICTURE BOOKS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE BEGINNING READING PROCESS

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CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO ILLUSTRATION'S IN PICTURE BOOKS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE BEGINNING READING PROCESS

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Recently the Commission on Education of the National Academy of Education, with the sponsorship of the National Institute of Education produced the publication entitled Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson et al, 1985). This publication is a report of a study that focused on the examination of cross-disciplinary knowledge of research about the intricacies of the reading process and aspects of reading instruction. The Commission called upon "experts" from the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois to conduct this study and to prepare a report of their findings. The authors of Becoming a Nation of Readers were asked by the Commission to bring together the findings of research pertaining to aspects of human cognition and environmental influences that have an impact on the reading process as well as aspects of the role of testing and techniques and materials for reading instruction. Many of the research studies cited in the report were published in the 1980's but the findings of the studies simply supported what has been known to most professors of reading methods or to informed classroom teachers and reading specialists for a decade if not longer.

It is not only the emphasis on the obvious and long-known "truisms" reflected in the research studies selected and discussed in the report which I find disconcerting. There are two other aspects with which I must take issue: One is the kinds of reading materials that were designated as sources for meeting the various functions of reading. The second is the omission of the role of picture books, especially the role that illustrations in picture books play on the beginning reading process. Both of these concerns point to the fact that the "experts" who conducted the study and prepared the report are not aware of the various functions of literature in the reading program nor did

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they delve into the latest research on children's responses to literature, in general, and the influences of children's literature on the beginning reading process, in particular. It is these concerns which are discussed below.

THE INFLUENCES OF PICTURE BOOKS ON THE BEGINNING READING PROCESS. The authors of Becoming a Nation of Readers did not mention that illustrations in picture books influence certain attitudes and skills associated with the beginning reading process such as vocabulary development, extending experiential background, comprehension, mental imagery, motivation to read, and extending reading interests. The research that pertains to these influences is found in the response to literature studies and children's responses to art, especially book art. I have identified below some of the studies I found to be especially important and briefly stated the major findings that pertain to aspects of the beginning reading process. Perhaps this review of the related research on the influences of illustrations in picture books on the beginning reading process will fill the gap that is so obvious in the Commission's report.

Some of the factors that tend to influence the impact that the illustrations in pictue books have on children in the preschool and kindergarten and early primary school age range are subjective and others pertain to the illustrations per se (Cianciolo, 1981 and 1983; Gardner, 1973 and 1978; Gardner, Winner and Kercher, 1975). The four subjective factors involving each individual child which affect the process of his/her perception and reception to the illustrations are: the child's maturity at a given age, the way in which the child is prepared for the experience of seeing the illustration, one's emotional state at the particular moment in question, and the number of times the child returns to the picture(s). The implications that

one reads into these factors are, in large measure, shaped by the knowledge and theories about how children learn and child growth and development. The three major factors about book illustrations per se include: the content (the topic or the subject) depicted in the pictures; the physical makeup of the illustrations (the issue of color or black-and-white, the intensity of the colors or the combinations of colors); and the style of art (the shape of the content) used by the artist to create the illustrations. Crucial here is the book selector's knowledge about the books that are available from which to make his/her selections for use with children in the classroom, library, or home.

Research conducted since 1970 demonstrates that language learning, especially as language affects comprehensive, rote learning and retention by young children, non-native English speakers and remedial readers, is significantly facilitated when illustrations accompany the printed text. The ability to increase learning by self-produced internal visual elaborations created when reading text without illustrations rather than through text with illustrations seems to be a developmental phenomenon (Pressley, 1976). Or, it might well be one that results from conditioning by those who tell children that picture books and illustrated books are for "little children", for traditionally books addressed to older readers tend to be unillustrated or at best with very few illustrations (Marks, 1983 and Peeck, 1974).

Levin and Divine-Hawkins (1974) demonstrated that young children who listened to stories can create their own mental images corresponding to stories they hear more easily than they can when they read these same stories, but unillustrated, on their own. One major implication of this study for the teacher of beginning and remedial readers is that children at this stage of

learning to read are too self-conscious about the act of reading; they are unable to forget the printed word and at the same time get involved enough in the story to create their own images for the unillustrated stories. Those who have to just listen to the story do not have to deal with the task of decoding the printed word. Being free from the interference of dealing with the printed page allows them to create their own images more easily.

Rohwer and Matz (1975) reported that subjects who experienced difficulty deriving meaning from the printed word were helped by the presence of illustrations. This finding is of particular importance to teachers working with young children whose experiential background and language differs markedly from that which some textbook writers and curriculum guide writers assume the children have acquired in order to use their textbooks or engage in the learning activities identified in the curriculum guides.

Norwegian research psychologist, Peeck (1974) reported that children tend to read stories accompanied by pictures more rapidly. His explanation was the presence of illustrations served a motivational function (reading was more fun, more curiosity was raised, etc.) and the story could be more easily understood.

It becomes quite apparent from the findings of these studies that children who do not read the text easily (beginning readers, experientially different and bilingual children) need to be taught to read from picture books or profusely illustrated textbooks. When selecting illustrated materials for use with children who are dependent on the illustrations it is imperative that the book selector (teacher, librarian, or parent) choose those that contain illustrations that are not only artfully executed but complement, clarify, and extend the text concepts.

There are several important parent diaries containing anecdotal accounts of children's responses to early read aloud experiences with picture books. These accounts offer enlightening information about the role these experiences can play in language and concept development and influence later attitudes about reading. Also, these diaries are important sources for information about children's responses to storytelling experiences, especially to illustrations in picture books because they reflect notes taken on observations of behavior over long periods of time in a wide variety of situations. Rarely are opportunities for response studies typified by such breadth and depth accessible to the experimental or outside ethnographic researchers. White's (1954) full length account of her daughter's story reading experiences over a three year period is frequently cited in the professional literature and is considered to have pioneered the parent diary. One important fact about her report is that it dramatizes the idea that what an adult reader does during story readings can play a significant role in a child's response to storyreading experiences.

A number of parent accounts of children's responses to early experiences with picture books have been published in small journals in Australia and England: ORANA: A Journal of School and Children's Librarianship (from Australia) and Children's Libraries Newsletter (from England). None of these reports compared with the full accounts written, first by White (1954) and more recently, by Butler (1979) and by Crago and Crago (1983) and M. Crago (1979). Butler's account was based on a three-year span in the life of Cushis, her granddaughter, a child born with a chromosome deficiency that caused severe physical and perceptual handicaps and initially was declared to be mentally retarded. Butler documented with convincing anecdotes her claim that

picturebooks, which were introduced to Cushla when she was four months old, had a profound impact on her development. More specifically, she reported that they provided her with opportunities for language, imaginative and visual development, plus a deep respect and love for reading.

Husband and wife diarists, Crago and Crago, in a book (1980) and numerous articles in professional journals (Crago and Crago, 1970, Crago M., 1975, 1978, 1979, and 1980) drew on data from a four year longitudinal record of their daughter's responses to picture books and related experiences. Their data are based on meticulous quantification of audio-tape recordings of sessions supplemented with some note taking. In their reports they discuss precisely several aspects of the child's literary development and response, including a chronological description of the child's preverbal experiences with picture books and her responses to repeated readings of single texts over a long period.

It is apparent from these studies, and there are many others not quite as comprehensive or longitudinal, that there is no paucity of research focusing on children's responses to illustrations, in general, and the significance of children's responses to illustrations in children's books to learning to read in particular.

A number of studies demonstrated that illustrations in picture books or basal readers do not contribute to the child's ability to decode per se. But few educational decision makers would deny that reading goes well beyond word recognition skills. Of significance to teachers of reading are the research findings pertinent to other major aspects directly related to learning to read. Some researchers reported that book illustrations did serve to spark or increase children's reading interests and helped to enrich and extend

vicariously their experiential background. They played a major role in facilitating growth in literacy-related skills and attitudes such as vocabulary development, comprehension, and critical thinking as well as aesthetic discrimination of the literary and graphic aspects of picture books. Very few of the researchers focused on children's responses to isolated pictures. In other words, most of them examined children's responses to illustrations that accompanied corresponding texts, such as in picture books and profusely illustrated basal readers or trade books in which the illustrations were inherent components of the stories, or wordless books in which the stories are told entirely by a sequence of pictures.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING PICTURE BOOKS TO FOSTER BEGINNING READING COMPETENCIES. The positive influences of literature in the picture book genre on the beginning reading process are more likely to occur if the picture book satisfies certain basic selection criteria (Cianciolo, 1979 and 1981). These criteria are discussed briefly below.

First, the story must be worth reading, whether it is read aloud to the child or "read" by him/her independently by looking at the illustratins and the printed word. This means that the story must be well-crafted, with all of the components of literature thoroughly developed by the blending of the text and the illustrations. Thus, the characters are believeable; the plot contains action, excitement, and suspense; the setting is identifiable in terms of time and place, even if this is interpreted as "long ago and far away" or "here-and-now;" the theme, which pertains to the underlying idea or in some instances, "the message," should be of significance to the child; and the style of writing and the art work should be childlike (not childish) and should stimulate sensory images. With the right blend of all these elements, which

are revealed to the reader in the text and illustrations, the book should achieve a unified structure that evokes a balance between anticipation and suspense and is typified by a vitality and spontaniety that is in keeping with childhood.

More about the language that is used in the text to tell the story: The language in children's picture books should be fine language, yet unpretentious so the child will understand it, will find some of it familiar and other aspects of it new and broadening. The language used in the text should offer the child new words as well as familiar words, both of which will offer him/her new images and new experiences and/or fresh, new ways of looking at and thinking and feeling about experiences that are familiar and even mundane.

There is no excuse for a parent, teacher or librarian to choose "easy-to-read" or "beginning-to-read" books for read aloud experiences. There are exceptions, of course, but most of these books are controlled in vocabulary and sentence structure and length. Seldom can an author develop any or all of the components of literature so necessary for quality literature. Furthermore, most of these books are quite similar in format--size, shape, placement of text and illustrations--once one looks inside the covers they tend to all look quite alike. They all tend to look like the basal primer readers, often which they are modeled in the first place. These controlled ridden, easy-to-read trade books may be fine practice materials for use in reading clinics, or for use in reading instructions programs where attempts are being made to implement aspects of Individualized Reading or Multiple Resource Reading Plans. Clearly, most of the controlled, "easy-to-read" or "Beginning to Read" trade books, cannot offer through their illustrations, format, or text the many benefits that have been attributed to quality picture books.

Second, the content of the story or factual book should reflect the child's experiential background or should be at least within his/her level of understanding. Stories should do more than bring about the reasonably and comfortably familiar. They should help the child see the familiar in a new light and they should offer totally new vicarious experiences to him/her. Thus, the stories clarify, enhance, enrich and extend the child's backgound of experiences and store of knowledge. None of these benefits are likely to be realized, of course, unless the story brings pleasure to the child and he feels it is worth his/her time and effort to listen to it read aloud or "read" the words and illustrations independently.

Third, the relationship between the text and the illustrations should be coordinated into a coherent, unified whole. It is no small challenge to accomplish this criteria. Two different forms of creative expression, namely text and illustrations are combined to produce one form of creative expression that is unique and complete, in-and-of itself. When combined to create a picture book, the text and illustrations create conditions of dependence and interdependence. When blended the right blend of spontaniety and planning must be achieved.

The full meaning of a picture book can only be revealed in this context. The old adage that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts has definite application here: A book illustration amounts to far more than it would when viewed as a single picture, even though it is beautiful and appears to be as complete and comprehensive a work of art as any gallery painting could be. It could serve as an attractive wall picture in one's home, classroom or office. But when viewed as an illustration designed to express the literary elements voiced in a piece of fiction or collection of poetry, its perspective changes.

The gestalt functions for anyone familiar with the book for which the pictures were originally made; when viewed in connection with the aspect of the text it illustrates each picture exudes greater depth and breadth in mood, rhythm, design, and meaning. Going one nmore step beyond this, another phenomenon would occur when looking at any one of these pictures in relation to all the other pictures in the book in which it appears and in relation to the literary elements in the text: one would see a complete and comprehensive work of literary art, namely a picture book or a profusely illustrated book, depending on which specific book they examined in this manner.

Fourth, an illustration makes the content of the text concrete, but it must be more than a literal translation or mere explanation of the printed word. The combination of the verbal with the visual in a picture book does not mean that the contents and meanings may be "translated" from one medium to another, for no communication in one medium is ever exactly translatable into any other. By its very nature and purpose an illustration must go well beyond the level of literal translation. In order to make the text more concrete, the picture should provide details that the reader might miss or not fully understand; it might even provide a totally new way of looking at, thinking and feeling about the words. These details should not be overemphasized; instead they should be well integrated so that they do not interfere with the unity of the whole. They should add interest but remain subordinate to the whole. Readability of the pictures does not mean that the viewer should perceive all the details at once. In fact, an artistic and effective readable picture is one in which the viewer slowly discovers more details each time one sees the picture and the overall depth of response to the story intensifies (Shulevitz, 1985).

It is important to recognize the artistic excellence of the illustrations in children's picture books or nontechnical information books is not identical with photographic accuracy. The illustrations should not be merely mirror reflections of reality, although they do share with mirror reflections the elusive magic of transformation of reality. In book illustrations which are handmade visual statements, the artist expresses a selective interpretation of the reality depicted in and associated with the story. This is not true of most photographs or of a mirror reflection. An illustration, therefore, should be considered an illusion to rather than a miniature of the reality alluded to in the text. Even in textbooks the book art should allow for the personal accent of the illustrator (Sontag, 1977; Gombrich, 1969).

THE VARIED FUNCTIONS OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE. Emphasized in Becoming a Nation of Readers is the idea that to learn to read the children's environment must be rich in experiences that expose children to written language so they will learn the purposes of printed language as well as the specific skills that are required to recognize letters and words and to match letters and sounds. One can hardly take issue with this bit of sage advice. It was also mentioned in the report that parents and educators should provide situations where childen learn the relationship between written language and meaning, that they need to learn about the functions of written language and about what adults mean when they talk about reading. They stated in the report that reading materials would serve these three functions: to entertain (as in books), to inform (as in instructions on packages), and to direct (as on traffic signs (p. 32). The significant impact of reading aloud to preschoolers and that "independent reading" of books (in contrast to workbooks and computer drills) had on reading fluency and the whole act of reading was mentioned, but barely.

All this adds up to the fact that the authors of the report obviously consider "books" (children's literature in the form of library books or trade books) should be used primarily to accomplish non-instructional purposes, especially entertainment and leisure time. The lack of knowledge about children's literature and the limited use they would make of it in the reading program is revealed in the examples of the varied questions of written language that were offered by the authors of the report. There is so much more that should have been said about why and how one should use quality trade books with preschool children in the home and in the kindergarten and early primary grade classrooms. Anyone who has perused the children's books in bookstores recently or has looked at the books in a children's library, (be it in a public library, a central school library or a classroom library) would be impressed with the fact that contemporary children's books can be read for purposes such as entertainment, information, and for directions. Even the most superficial examination of contemporary children's literature would cause one to conclude that the reading of these selections need not be limited to free time or independent reading activities. A wealth of excellent library or trade books that would serve these functins (and other functions) are currently available for use with your chidlren from infancy through age six or seven. Perhaps citing a few titles of picture books chosen from the literally thousands that are currently available will suffice to demonstrate the narrowness of the functions that the authors of the report designated to books.

Three-to-six year olds are bound to be entertained by the here-and-now story Alfie Gets in First (Hughes 1981). This is a thoroughly credible and humorous story of what happens when a little boy accidently locks his mother and baby sister outside and cannot reach the door knob. It is illustrated with

expressive line and full color watercolor wash drawings. There are two other picture books about this amiable child: Alfie's Feet (Hughes, 1982) and Alfie Gives a Hand (Hughes, 1983). Fanciful stories also entertain. One that young children find satisfying and titillating each time they hear it read aloud or retell it to themselves as they "read" the expressionistic line and four color watercolor wash drawings and the printed text is the cheerful and exaggerated tall tale entitled Avocado Baby (Burninghan, 1982). The alert reader (adult or child) will notice that the end pages contain pictures of the baby's escapades, exhibiting its unusual strength through a maze of botanically accurate avocado plants. Born a weakling and not fond of food, the baby is fed an avacado pear as a last resort. It becomes strong! So avocado pear becomes the baby's daily diet and soon the reader sees it break out from the straps of its high chair, pulls childen uphill in a cart, chases a burglar out of the house, moves the piano, pushes a stalled car, and throws two bullies into a pond when they harassed the children in the park.

One could (and should!) use picture books to provide young children with information. Information that would provide answers to persistent questions of "Who am I?" and "Why am I like I am?" These books would alert childen to their immediate world and can also be used to introduce them to new and more expansive environments; explaining in terms they can understand the meanings and possibilities of life and nature, especially why and how and when things happen. Picture books can also be used to help young children learn about aspects of the past--historical persons, periods of time and events of the past. Fiction and non-fiction picture books can be used as sources of information as was demonstrated in Picture Books for Children (Cianciolo, 1981). For purposes of brevity only three of the many non-fiction picture

books available to young children will be cited at this point to emphasize that picture books are a valid source which one can read for information and the authors of Becoming a Nation of Readers should have acknowledged that trade books serve this function most aptly.

Eric Carle united superb collages in vivid full color and simple poetic prose in The Tiny Seed (Carle, 1970) to portray the beauty of the changing seasons and the life cycle of a flowering plant. An innovative appraoch by which the primary concepts of five shapes (square, triangle, circle, rectangel, and "irregular") are demonstrated in Shapes (Youldon, 1979). Preschools are bound to be fascinated by and most certainly will learn from this concept book in which the shapes are turned into familiear animals and objects. Clear, brilliant colors, the unexpected appearance of the shapes cut out of pages, plus the sparse and simple text in large boldfaced type serve to make this concept book one that will attract children in the first place and one they will read on their own many times over. Other books in this series also written and illustrated by the talented Gillian Youldon are Colors (1979), Sizes (1979), and Numbers (1979). The subject of Sally can't See (Petersen, 1977) is an easy-to-read book in which readers are introduced to a child who was born blind. They will learn from her story, illustrated with photographs in full color, what life is like for a sightless person: the importance of Braille, the purpose of the white cane, the intensive use the other four senses to compensate for the missing sight, and the courage as well as the determination and possibility for one who is blind to live much the way any sighted person does. Ruth Belov Gross focuses on Charles Lindbergh's 1927 flight from New York to Paris in her very brief, partial biography entitled Dangerous Adventure: Lindbergh's Famous Flight (Gross, 1977). The illustrations

by Susanne Suba, done in line-and-wash impressionistic paintings, and the list of facts at the end of the book provide additional information to that included in the text, giving greater depth, breadth, and credibility to this picture book biography. To foster the development of some of the most basic critical reading skills, one might have five to seven year olds compare and contrast aspects of Dangerous Adventure with the picture book biography of another pioneer of aviation depicted in The Glorious Flight: Across the Channel with Louis Bleriot (Provensen and Provensen, 1983). Large detailed expressionistic paintings in full color and the polished, easy-to-read text relate Bleriot's long struggle to construct and fly an operating airplane. Both of the aviation pioneers are depicted as heroes and in both books the biographers' respect and admiration for the men whose lives they have chosen to tell are readily apparent. Yet each biography offers a stark contrast in tone and style of writing and book art. The tone of the text and impressionistic paintings in the biography about Lindbergh are serious. In contrast, one finds many examples of gentle humor throughout the text and the expressionistic paintings that tell Bleriot's story. Children will no doubt be intrigued by these differences in treatment and tone in this kind of informational book. Yet such differences will alert them to the fact that the teller of lives can maintain the necessary authenticity and respect for the subject of the biography but differ dramatically in the style and tone they use to tell about the lives of their subjects.

Picture books also serve as a fine source for reading directions. Consider The Secret Birthday Message (Carle, 1977) and Things to Make and Do for Christmas (Weiss, 1980). In Eric Carle's The Secret Birthday Message there is an appeal to the child's sense of play and anticipation. A birthday message

in sparse text combined with a pictorial code explains how to find the present. The pages are cut in shapes or with openings and the present at the end is a puppy in a basket. A "map" shows the reader how to find his/her way back. The directions in Things to Make and Do for Christmas are given in pen-and-ink and watercolor wash cartoon illustrations and an easy-to-read text. A fine array of projects, stories, and information about the Christmas hoiday season is organized in four one-week sessions leading up to Christmas. This book is typical of the many how-to-do-it books that are published for young children each publishing season.

If young children are going to use picture books as sources for entertainment, information, and directions they must enjoy the stories or the stories or the information they offer. Enjoyment occurs only when one identifies with aspects of the story (characters setting, action) and understands and finds the information interesting and relevant to his world. Wisely chosen library or trade books, presented in the right way to children when they are ready for them and/or need to read them in order to satisfy particular purposes, can demonstrate to them in a positive manner the value of reading books for various functins, including entertainment, information, and directions. Awareness of these various functions of books and using them to accomplish various purposes can foster the habit of reading, a major goal for any reading program of worth.

SUMMARY. Experimental and ethnographic research on children's responses to picture books, especially the illustrations in picture books, that was conducted in the 1970's and 1980's demonstrate that illustrations influence certain attitudes and skills associated with the beginning reading process, such as vocabulary development, extending experiential background,

comprehension, mental imagery, motivation to read, and extending reading interests. These responses pertain primarily to illustrations that are inherent components of the stories rather than in isolation. Thus, these findings of the research on children's responses to illustrations shed considerable insight about the influence of illustrations on the process of learning to read. Since they also offer some implications about the criteria that teachers and school librarians should consider when selecting illustrated books for your children (whether these books were used for reading instruction or for literary experiences), the writer discussed briefly some of these criteria. Some literary selections which might be read for purposes of entertainment, information, and directions were identified to dramatize the fact that the authors of Becoming a Nation of Readers failed to mention the use of library or trade books for these functions.

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